

Kathmandu – Yesterday, USAID celebrated the achievements of its women's empowerment program – known as Reshunga Mahila Karyakram in Nepali – at Gulmi district. This program mitigated the negative impacts of conflict and promoted peace by improving literacy, economic skills, and livelihoods of over 17,000 women from Gulmi, Arghakanchi, Rukum and Salyan districts.

This five-year \$1.48 million program, funded by USAID and implemented by World Education and its local NGO partners, started in November 2003. Working at the grass-root level, this program helped empower women by teaching them to read, helping them start small businesses and increasing their household incomes. The program also helped create 600 credit and savings groups that generated Rupees 25.8 million in savings and Rupees 127.5 million in revolving loans for their businesses.

At the closing ceremony, Beth S. Paige, Mission Director of USAID, remarked, "You can see the results of the program. In all four districts, women have gained confidence, increased their skills and knowledge, and demonstrated a commitment to continuing the micro-finance groups. They are investing in their businesses. What these 17,000 women have achieved is remarkable considering that they had little or no previous access to education or the funds to start a business." She emphasized, "We hope that the Government of Nepal will continue to build on these achievements and support the women in these four districts. We also hope the Government and other donors will replicate this model in all the other 71 districts of Nepal."

Bhima Sinjali Magar, a beneficiary and a member of the women's credit and savings group said, "I realized pig farming could help me earn extra money and still allow me to continue my daily wage job. I have three daughters to look after. With the new skills and knowledge I learned from the program, I began my business with one pig and now I'm a proud owner of eight pigs. I earn NPR 8,656 per pig. This new income has helped me better provide medical care, school fees, cooking fuel, spices, cloth and extra grains such as rice and wheat for my family."

The one-day closing event was also attended by other USAID representatives, Constituent Assembly members from Gulmi, local and district-level officials, NGO partners, beneficiaries of the program and other community members.